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(Negative)

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EXTERNAL - POLITICAL

1. Khrushchev Grants Written Interviews. At the outset of the new year, KHRUSHCHEV resorted to the familiar device of written interviews to express the positions of the Soviet Government on a number of international issues. Interviews were granted to Minoru ODA, editor of the Japanese newspaper Chubu Nippon, and to Hans THIRRING, an Austrian professor. In these interviews, Khrushchev reaffirmed that Soviet foreign policy is based on the principle of peaceful coexistence and asserted that peace could be strengthened through agreement on general and complete disarmament, abolition of the colonial system, signature of a German peace treaty and the normalization of the situation in Berlin. Replying to Thirring, Khrushchev expressed confidence in the ultimate victory of Communism and said that people would see that socialism is the most progressive system in the "prolonged peaceful competition having no definite time limits."

The basic purpose of these interviews appeared to be to create pressures in the non-Communist world for concessions to the USSR in the military-strategic sphere against the hope that these would usher in a new era of peaceful East-West relations. The discussion of peaceful coexistence for non-Communist audiences may also have been intended to offset recent Soviet doctrinal pronouncements that peaceful coexistence is a higher form of class struggle on an international scale--a point addressed to the Communist faithful.

2. Berlin/Germany. Ambassador THOMPSON's meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister GROMYKO on January 2 has thus far gone unreported in the Soviet press.

Meanwhile reports of "provocations" in West Berlin continue to appear sporadically in the Soviet press. Visits by FRG officials, destruction of S-bahn equipment, and alleged American responsibility for such "acts" have been the central themes in these articles. Izvestiya on December 4 added recent visits to West Berlin by John J. McCLOY and British Labour Party leader GAITSKELL to the list of "provocations." In the first recent Soviet press reference to "negotiations", Izvestiya charged these actions are deliberately aimed at "frustrating any negotiations on international problems."

3. Middle East. In their interpretation of the abortive military coup in Lebanon, the Soviets drew heavily on the Communist journal Al Nida to allege that the coup was organized by the British, probably with the knowledge of the Americans and West Germans, to set the state for the establishment of a regime which would agree to turn Lebanon into an imperialist military base.

In a similar vein, the Soviet press charged that the concentration of British naval and air forces in the Persian Gulf represented a resort to the diplomacy of armed intimidation and blackmail. These maneuvers, the Soviets asserted, are undertaken each time the interests of the imperialist monopolies operating on Arab soil are jeopardized. Soviet journalists concluded, however, that "gunboat diplomacy" was outmoded and that these movements would not scare the Arab nations.

4. Mikoyan Visit to Guinea. Presidium member MIKOYAN left Moscow on January 4 for a hurried trip to Conakry. It is likely that his trip is related to the setback which the Soviets recently experienced in their relations with Guinea, including the

apparent expulsion of the Soviet Ambassador from Conakry. The supposition is that economic and technical assistance might be used as a lever to bring about an improvement in relations. This assumption is strengthened by the announcement that Mikoyan was accompanied by Dmitri DEGTYAR, the Vice-Chairman of the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR for External Economic Relations. Following his visit to Guinea, Mikoyan will take advantage of his presence in Africa to visit Ghana.

INTERNAL - POLITICAL

5. De-Stalinization on the Cultural Front. Following the efforts of Agitprop Chief ILYICHEV to set the bounds within which Soviet artists may criticize Soviet reality or, perhaps more dangerously from the regime's point of view, hold themselves aloof from political commitment ("skepticism") (WEEKA No. 52, 1961), the Soviet press continues to reflect the struggle that is being waged on the "cultural front."

An important article by Boris Sergeyevich RYURIKOV, Deputy Chief of the CPSU Central Committee's Section on Culture and a member of the board of the Union of Soviet Writers, was published in Literaturnaya Gazeta on January 4, in a further attempt to take the steam out of what appears to be an effort to start another "thaw."

The new stage of de-Stalinization, like its predecessor in 1956-1958, confronts the Party with complex problems in rationalizing its continuing role as overseer and guide of artistic, and particularly literary, effort. Voices have been raised, claiming for the writers the role of conscience in Soviet society. Such a one is that of Georgiy GULIA, who, writing in Literaturnaya Gazeta on December 5, 1961, expressed his joy at the decisions of the XXII Congress, but found it mixed with grief "for those whom we lost in the past, for the victims of the cult of personality, who today are no longer with us." "And I involuntarily wonder how many lives might have been saved if, in 1937, a truthful essay on the unjust repressions, a true story of violations of legality, could have been published. ...That is what I think, listening to my heart-beat."

Gulia's voice is one of the few to make itself heard unequivocally in public. That others, and those of more authoritative figures, are speaking out behind the facade of the officially controlled press, is made clear by Ryurikov, who says the main task of the Soviet Communist Party in the field of culture is the need to combat "the striving to separate, to tear away, artistic creation from the life of the people, building Communism. Bourgeois individualism, idealistic theories of 'supra-classism', the striving to slur over the boundary between socialist and bourgeois ideology, to take a neutral position 'above the fray', do significant harm to the cause of the development of socialist culture." Those who espouse these harmful views are "revisionists", people who "snipe at the Party from anarchistic positions and confront it with the demand for 'non-interference' in the development of culture."

How to deal with this problem? Ryurikov postulates two styles of "leadership of cultural development": the Leninist and the Stalinist, the right way and the wrong way. The "foundation" of the right kind of cultural leadership is "the great

Leninist idea of the party-ness of literature", which results in "the doctrine of socialist realism", now embodied in the "Program of the Party."

To demands for the removal of the dead hand of the Party and literary bureaucracy from literature and art, Ryurikov thus finds the same answer as STALIN, but he sanitizes "party-ness" and "socialist realism" by attributing them to LENIN.

It is doubtful that the ferment on the literary front will be so easily stilled. In his speech to the Ideological Conference, Komsomol Secretary S. P. PAVLOV "sharply criticized" the "Young Prose" group, and then added: "Unfortunately, these erroneous tendencies...are supported by individual venerable writers."

A suggestive, although unconnected, sign of the times occurred on January 4, when Viktor Borisovich SHKLOVSKIY, a founder of the "Serapion Brotherhood", the theoretician of Russian Formalism, and the friend and companion of ZOSHCHENKO and ZAMYATIN, spoke at a public lecture devoted to the 17th anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw. Shklovskiy talked about a recent visit to Warsaw, and not about Soviet literature. But his appearance and the warmth with which his eloquent little talk was greeted could be regarded as a token of the continuing vigor of the true tradition of Russian literature.

6. USSR Supreme Soviet: New Law Imposes Punishments of Up to Three Years for Damaging Agricultural Equipment. On December 29, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet promulgated a new law permitting up to one year's deprivation of liberty, or corrective labor for the same period, for criminal neglect leading to the damage or destruction of tractors, automobiles, combines, "and other agricultural machinery". The law authorized an increased penalty of up to three years' deprivation of liberty if the action results in immediate heavy damage.

By its wording, it seems plain that the new measure is intended primarily as a deterrent. It is designed to reduce heavy damage to agricultural machinery caused by carelessness and neglect, which annually take an enormous number of machines out of production or cripple their productive effectiveness. In a land where repair facilities and supplies of spare parts are often nearly non-existent, even minor damage can put equipment out of action. If repair is then delayed, and the machinery is not properly housed, total loss of the machinery often results. Last summer, the press was full of reports that many thousands of combines were inoperative just before the harvest had to be gathered. The regime obviously hopes to reduce losses due to such inefficiencies this year.

As an indicator of the negligible amount of real power possessed by the USSR's Supreme Soviet, it is interesting to note that this important measure was enacted by the Presidium, and not at the recent plenary session, which took place as recently as the beginning of December (WEEKA No. 50, December 15, 1961). In accordance with Soviet constitutional practice, punishments under the new measure will thus be imposed before the Supreme Soviet has a chance to rubber-stamp the new measure.

"Election" of a new Supreme Soviet has been set for March 18 (Pravda, December 30, 1961). Article 55 of the Soviet Constitution states that the newly-elected body must be convened not later than three months after its election. Accordingly, a new session of the Supreme Soviet can be expected before the end of June 1962.

7. New "Premier" for Azerbaydzhan. At the recent session of the Azerbaydzhanian Republic Supreme Soviet, M. A. ISKENDEROV, until now Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic, was elected Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. E. N. ALIKHANOV was elected "premier" in his place.

Alikhanov had been a secretary of the Republic Party's Central Committee for the last two years, following his release as Republic Minister of Petroleum when that post was abolished in 1959. Thus, he became a CC Secretary at about the same time that V. Ye. SEMICHASTNYY, now Chairman of the USSR KGB, was appointed CC Second Secretary in the wake of a wholesale reshuffle of the leadership of the Azerbaydzhanian Republic Party (Embassy D-398, November 14, 1961).

8. Olga Skorokhodova, Soviet "Helen Keller", Defends her Doctoral Dissertation. A "Novosti" Press Agency feature tells the human-interest story of 47-year old Olga SKOROKHODOVA, blind, deaf, and dumb since she suffered from meningitis at the age of five (Turkmenskaya Iskra, December 28, 1961). She was one of two, out of a total of eight deaf-mutes attending a special school in Kharkov, saved from destruction during the war. Six fellow pupils are said to have been killed by the Nazis.

Authorities at the Scientific Research Institute of Pedagogical Science of the RSFSR characterize Skorokhodova's defense of her dissertation for the degree Candidate of Pedagogical Science as "an important event in the history of world science."

Such a success story would be a triumphant tale capable of standing by itself, but apparently the Soviet propagandist is unable to resist the temptation to make a comparison with the U.S. Compared to Helen KELLER (deaf, dumb, and blind from birth, a point not mentioned in the article), Skorokhodova's achievement is even more praiseworthy because she is a "scientific-materialist." Helen Keller, on the other hand, has become the "object of speculation by religious fanatics" and her book has as its primary thesis gratitude to God for her success in becoming acquainted with the world.

This is not the first time that Skorokhodova has attracted public attention. Her book, "How I Sense and Perceive the Surrounding World", has been published in at least eight different languages outside the USSR. In addition, 20 scientific works and 50 poems are attributed to her. However, this appears to be the first occasion on which propaganda concerning her has been linked with unfavorable references to Helen Keller.

9. 60 Percent of Moscow-Area Automobile Accidents Involve Intoxicated Drivers. In an article entitled "Drunks Behind the Wheel", Leninskoye Znamya of January 4, 1962, describes an incident on the Minsk highway in which a drunken hit-and-run driver killed an invalid in a wheel chair and injured his eight-year old son. The article suggests that drunkenness is probably the principal cause of motor vehicle accidents in the Moscow-area. As is customary, no statistics are offered, but the following revealing statement is made:

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"The incident on the Minsk highway, unfortunately, is not exceptional. Every week on the Moscow-area highways, in cities and villages, there are a lot of accidents. And 60 percent of them are the results of drunken drivers. The strange weather this winter-freezing, thawing, and re-freezing--with its sheet ice, far and away complicated conditions on several main auto highways. But even this obvious danger does not stop some ardent drinkers /from driving/."

Even after taking into consideration poor highway conditions and bad driving practices in the USSR, the casual observer of Soviet highway safety is often unfavorably impressed by the number of accidents he sees, including, sometimes, dead and injured (Embassy D-888, June 30, 1961). In view of the obviously low traffic density the impression becomes credible that the USSR has a surprisingly high volume of accidents. That as high as 60 percent are caused by drunks would help explain the recent lawpassed to lift licenses of drunken drivers caught driving when drunk.

The regime, faced with the practical problem of reducing drunken driving, may take action not only against drivers, but their supervisors as well. The article in Leninskoye Znamya raises the question of whether the directors of various transport depots do not share some of the guilt for permitting known drinkers to get behind the wheel. Admitting that the number of police available for a crack-down on guilty drivers is a "drop in the ocean", the article also appeals to voluntary public vigilance in its various forms: special traffic-safety druzhinni, comradely courts, education of youth, and education in transport collectives.

MILITARY

(Negative).

For the Ambassador:

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Counselor for Political Affairs

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